

**U.S. Embassy's
Sixth Annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Civil Rights
Essay Contest Winners**



Cedric Munroe
Doris Johnson Sr. High School
Grade 12

“It’s not a past tense for me. Dr. King continues to have an impact on my life, as he does upon the lives of many people in the world. A dream never dies. I’m trying to be that fair person, that kind, generous and courageous person, that loving person that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was and encouraged us to become.” - *Maya Angelou.*

Marguerite Ann Johnson, more commonly known as Dr. Maya Angelou, was born on April 4, 1928. She is a known actress, activist, poet, author and an Academy of Achievement inductee. This “Phenomenal Woman” has inspired many persons. She has inspired me to write poetry of my own, a few of which have won awards. Dr. Angelou fights for civil rights. She advocates equality among all races and same sex marriages, and motivates teen mothers and neglected persons to surmount their struggles.

Maya Angelou has traveled the world teaching moral values and virtues. She has been the voice for those who don’t have the courage to speak. Dr. Angelou volunteers her time at high schools around America to divulge her life experiences.

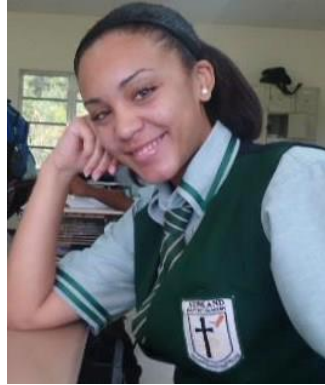
Having been a teenage mother, she knows the cruel pejoratives that premature mothers face. She has dedicated a portion of her autobiography, *"I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings"* to them. Dr. Angelou has counseled teen mothers, built their courage and motivated them to aspire for transcendence.

In addition, Dr. Angelou has focused on neglect within the black community. After witnessing blacks fighting blacks and committing adultery, she perceives these as "acts of negligence." To this end, Dr. Angelou has spent much time educating blacks of the importance of being their brother's keeper. Through her lectures at Wake Forest University, she has encouraged youths to be concerned for the welfare of others.

Furthermore, Dr. Angelou is an advocate of same sex marriage. Dr. King's teachings are evident in the works of Dr. Angelou. In order to eradicate this prejudice in society, Dr. Angelou has used her poetry to make others tolerant and more accepting of the gay community. She has recited her poem, *"Still I Rise"* at same sex conferences across America. Presently, she fights for the rights of gays with the intention of abolishing discrimination against them.

Both Dr. King and Dr. Angelou have inspired me to be a difference maker. I have made it my goal to make the world a more peaceful place. At my school, I'm the Vice President of the Interact Club. We've donated money and labor to the needy, and also comforted the elderly. My student council body and I have implemented a peer-tutoring program, to work with the academically challenged at my school. Additionally, as a prefect, I have taken time to talk with my male peers about anger management. Dr. Angelou's words, "You may encounter many defeats but you must never be defeated" serves as my motto. Dr. King inspired Dr. Maya Angelou, and she has inspired me. Now, I must inspire my peers to personify Dr. King's morals.

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Benita Delaney
Sunland Baptist Academy
Freeport, Grand Bahama
Grade 12

John Lewis

Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” – (The Quotations page, 1) Dubbed, ‘one of the most courageous persons the Civil Rights Movement ever produced’, John R. Lewis decided at a young age that he would be an instrument of change in the American Society. The words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. resonated with John Lewis, fueling his desire to become an activist. Compelled by observing the social prejudice around him, he did not allow his humble beginnings to deter him from his ambitious dream of becoming a world changer. (US House of Representatives, 1)

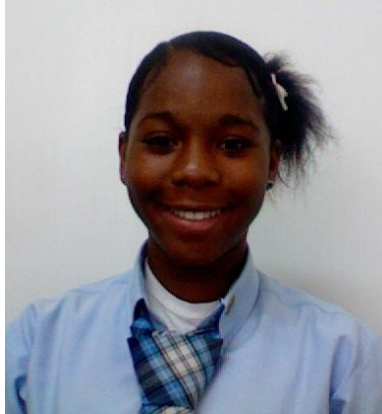
Throughout his life, Lewis has made some outstanding contributions in efforts to eradicate injustice. While in college, he organized ‘sit-in demonstrations at segregated lunch counters.’ He and his colleagues were humiliated, beleaguered, abused and eventually imprisoned; but none the less, their efforts remained relentless in the struggle for equality. In the 1960’s he became a freedom rider, opposing the discrimination against Black people on interstate buses. During these rides John Lewis jeopardized his safety by sitting in seats reserved for white clients. He was so passionate in his pursuit to help end segregation that he was involved in audacious demonstrations; despite his awareness that the repercussions of his actions could endanger his ability to graduate from American Baptist Theological Seminary. (Academy Of Achievement, 1), (The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, 1)

John Lewis had an integral part in the formation of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. As president, he was responsible for the arrangement of a campaign called 'Mississippi Freedom Summer' which sought to implement voting rights for Blacks in the South. (Academy Of Achievement, 1)

"Those who love peace must learn to organize as effectively as those who love war." - Martin Luther King Jr. This powerful quote is a very realistic one; fighting for peace does not require physical blows but it is essential that it leaves an impact. In order to leave an impact, we must devise strategies that are so elaborate that they successfully counteract the matter we are against (Good Reads, 1).

I would consider myself a peacemaker in my community. I detest the very thought of violence and disharmony, therefore, I strive to resolve conflicts in a peaceful manner. When I observe tension between two individuals, I usually get feedback from both sides in order to identify the problem and help to find a solution that will bring about reconciliation. I believe wholeheartedly, **Proverbs 15:1**: "A soft answer turneth away wrath but grievous words stir up anger." (Full Life Study Bible p 944) My passive personality contributes to my natural instinct to avoid confrontations. I guess you can say I was born to be an advocate for peace. As a mixed raced child, I have learnt to focus on how our differences make us unique, rather than how they separate us. My upbringing has increased my sensitivity toward matters of equality among people. I am infuriated when crude racial remarks are made and always driven to provide a strong defense. In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, I believe 'we must be the change we wish to see in the world'. (Schipul, 1)

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Devin Major
Moore's Island All-age School
Moore's Island, Abaco
Grade 10

Martin Luther King Jr. Inspiration

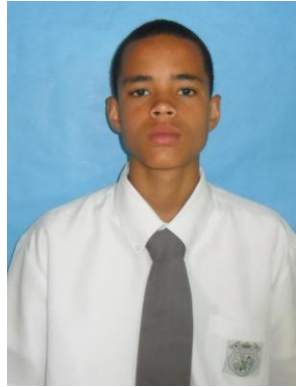
I too have felt the sting of inequality. In times like these I have derived strength from those who have been at the helm of black struggle. Dr. Martin Luther King and his predecessor Jesse Jackson have been my motivation. At a time when it was dangerous to stand for right, these men made themselves targets to empower black people. They fixed their eyes on the future, despite the mountain that stood in their way. Indeed I am a new student to Moore's Island and many days I feel, making it from one day to the next is a mountain I must climb. Daily I go to a school where I am the new girl and I am no one's sister or cousin. To everyone, I am a stranger. This new road I am on is a lonely one but like Dr. King and Jesse Jackson, I want to defy the odds.

Yes, I am a victim of teenage pregnancy, but this does not mean that I have to choose that path. Jesse Jackson's example empowers me to soar further than those around me could ever imagine. So, this means refusing the sexual advances of my classmates and enduring the hardships of being thought of as unpopular. As a black student, Mr. Jackson was enrolled at an all-white school and scared off by an angry mob of whites for his beliefs. Despite this Jackson's charge was, "Excellence is doing your best against the odds, as I run for President, I run against

the odds.” I too want to rise above the things that challenge me and make myself and my environment better.

Many High school teens celebrate with their classmates when they do wrong. I know these students are behaving in this way because they are simply bored and have not found their calling in life. I believe that, if our school had enough after school programs, more children would begin to use their time and youth for good. For example, although Junkanoo isn't a really big thing in Moore's island, starting a Junkanoo group helped many teenagers to occupy their time. Because Moore's Island All-age is ostracized from main stream Bahamas and generally does not get the financial support from the Ministry of education, this reality prodded me to advocate for a Technical Cadet program. This program is desperately needed at my school to create the proper business mindset for our future graduates. Our high schoolers desperately need this program, because for most of them Abaco is the world and the core subjects here is not adequately preparing them for the future. Jackson and Dr. King were both men that faced inequalities fiercely. As for me, I will not allow the inadequacies which exist at my school to prevail. I will make this island a better place through the power of the pen and my voice. Moore's Island All-age School will be better because I am prepared to knock until the door is opened.

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Stevanno Miller
Preston Albury High
Rock Sound, Eleuthera
Grade 11

The entire world owes a debt of gratitude to the Civil Rights Movement and, in particular, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. His sacrifice and the stand he took to empower black people have changed race relations worldwide. Many black Americans experienced firsthand the 'Jim Crow' Laws that enforced segregation. The Civil Rights Movement was organized to change the regulations which denied blacks the same rights as other Americans. Dr King made an invaluable contribution to the Civil Rights Movement.

Amongst the numerous Civil Rights leaders in the United States, I am humbled to focus on the Reverend Jesse Jackson. Born in Greenville, South Carolina, in 1941, Jackson worked closely with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Dr. King chose Jackson to form a group of black business and religious leaders in Chicago. The group began a successful program called Operation Breadbasket, whose sole purpose was to develop greater job opportunities for blacks.

In 1971, Jesse Jackson began another group called People United to Solve Humanity (PUSH). This organization encouraged large businesses to give jobs to blacks. The group also started educational and job training programs to enhance the skills of blacks. Later, Jesse Jackson felt that 'Black Power' could be further

gained through the ballot box. He travelled the country telling blacks to claim their right to vote. His idea was the more blacks who voted gave them a better chance to elect blacks into positions of power as head councilors, as mayors of cities, and as members of congress. They would get justice more effectively this way. Martin Luther King Jr. and Jesse Jackson shared the same goal, "An equal place for black Americans in the life of the United States". (A History of the Twentieth Century p. 131)

After Jackson lost his first race for President of the United States, he worked to register new voters. Two million more democratic voters registered between 1984 and 1986, most of whom were blacks. As a black political leader, he was able to change the thinking of many American voters. In addition to his political career, he encouraged many students in the inner cities to avoid drugs and embrace a good education.

My community is rapidly changing. A number of foreign nationals as well as Bahamians from other islands are taking up residence. There is a need for these persons to adjust and feel accepted. As I have a responsibility to contribute to a more peaceful and non-violent world, I ensure that these persons are made to feel a part of the community. Therefore, whenever we are on the basket ball court, I ensure that those of my age are involved in the game. When there are community events I interact with them and ask my peers to be kind to them. I also try to be a positive role model. I attend church regularly and take part in a number of community functions. I talk with my peers and encourage them to stay away from gangs. As a young teenager, I also show respect for myself and persons older than I. Like Dr. King and Reverend Jesse Jackson, I am determined to make a difference. What better way to begin by making a positive impact on my peers! One day I hope I am able to influence someone positively, leaving an everlasting impact on his/her life.